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**The Indo-Pacific Oceans
Initiative: Towards a Coherent
Indo-Pacific Policy for India**

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ABSTRACT

The Indo-Pacific region is increasingly being viewed as a global centre of gravity, both for its economic and demographic potential, and the security challenges that could frustrate those possibilities. India—as a champion of the principle of ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ or FOIP—has initiated engagements with its partners in the region, such as the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) that aims to ensure the security and stability of the region’s maritime domain. Even as the stakeholders have outlined a set of seven pillars for the initiative, there is still little clarity as to what can be expected from the IPOI. This paper offers recommendations for the IPOI to enable India play a more proactive and constructive role in the region.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific region is a vast maritime zone where the interests of many players are engaged: India, Japan, France, and the United States, as well as medium and smaller powers like Australia, Indonesia and South Africa; there are stakeholders from beyond the region, too.¹ In recent years, uncertainty has heightened in the region owing to China's territorial expansionist agenda, concerns for the United States' long-term commitment to Asia, as well as the limitations of existing multilateral institutions. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific is emerging as the new and expanded theatre of great-power contestation.

India has been championing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) idea, initiating forums like the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). It engages with its Indo-Pacific partners either bilaterally, or on plurilateral and multilateral platforms, in a multitude of spheres including maritime security, Blue Economy, maritime connectivity, disaster management, and capacity building. However, India continues to lack a coherent Indo-Pacific strategy.

In April 2019, India set up an Indo-Pacific wing in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The division is meant to integrate under one Indo-Pacific umbrella, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, and the Quadrilateral of the US, Japan, Australia, and India.² An Oceania division was created in the MEA in September 2020 to bring India's administrative and diplomatic focus on the region stretching from western Pacific (with the Pacific islands) to the Andaman Sea. This is the maritime space where China is trying to maintain its dominance and India is seeking to assert its own relevance.³

To promote its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, India launched the SAGAR vision in 2015. On 4 November 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the IPOI at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok. The main objective of the IPOI is to ensure the safety, security, and stability of the maritime domain,⁴ and to do that, seven pillars have been laid out.^a So far, however, little is known about what is to be expected out of the IPOI: Will new programmes be planned under the initiative, or is it simply an extension of India’s SAGAR vision?

This paper outlines specific recommendations for India to utilise the IPOI in playing a more proactive and constructive role in the Indo-Pacific. The authors have chosen to examine the IPOI as it is the most recent initiative introduced by PM Modi in the region. Moreover, given new developments—such as India extending an invitation to Vietnam to partner in this initiative—⁵ IPOI appears to be India’s way of developing a mechanism for cooperating with like-minded countries to pursue a ‘free, open, inclusive and rules-based’ Indo-Pacific. IPOI is being built on the pillars of India’s ‘Act East’ policy (focusing on the Eastern Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific) and ‘Act West’ (focusing on the Western Indian Ocean).

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Against a volatile and fast-changing regional and global geopolitical landscape, the seas are becoming a crucial arena for most, if not all tensions. Non-traditional security threats—including natural disasters, human trafficking, illegal fishing, and maritime terrorism—compound the risks to regional maritime security and stability.⁶ To begin with,

a The seven pillars are: Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport. (See, https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf)

one-third of the world's trade and significant volumes of East Asia's oil pass through the Eastern straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok-Makassar and the South China Sea (SCS). This necessitates security and stability, especially in the East Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific.

The Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR), sitting at the intersection of Asia, Africa, and Europe, is gaining greater strategic importance. The region's rich natural resource profile, estimated to be worth at least US\$333.8 billion, has generated interest amongst the bigger world economies.⁷ For India, the region is part of its strategic maritime frontier which extends from the Persian Gulf, to the East coast of Africa, and across the Malacca Strait. Significant traffic of container shipping transits the region and is home to some of the most vital and strategic maritime chokepoints such as Gulf of Aden, Bab-el-Mandeb, Mozambique Channel, Strait of Hormuz, and Cape of Good Hope. Running parallel to India's increasing outreach to African countries under PM Modi, and the Navy's role as a regional security partner, India has rightly identified the Western Indian Ocean as a region of primary interest.

India views the Indo-Pacific as a geographic and strategic expanse, with the ASEAN connecting the two great oceans—and at the heart of this conception lie the principles of inclusiveness, openness, ASEAN centrality, and unity. Security in the region must be maintained through dialogue, a common rules-based order, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and settlement of disputes in accordance with international law. Sustainable connectivity initiatives that promote mutual benefit should be continually fostered.⁸

From the beginning, India's vision of the Indo-Pacific has focused on the region stretching eastwards from the country, with ASEAN as the focus. New Delhi is broadening the regional canvas covered in its Indo-Pacific policy to include the Western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.⁹

Delivering the valedictory address at the joint Indian Ocean Dialogue and the Delhi Dialogue in December 2019, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said: “India is increasing the area covered by its Indo-Pacific policy to include the Western Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea – this includes the neighbours in the Gulf, the island nations of the Arabian Sea and Africa. Stretching the geographical and therefore strategic area of the Indo-Pacific to encompass not merely a region stretching eastwards from India, which would have the ASEAN as the central focus, India is now incorporating the western Indian Ocean and Africa. There is room for a Western Indian Ocean version of this concept too.”¹⁰

With India recognising “both geographical extremities” of the Indo-Pacific spectrum, it is time to give equal weightage and consideration to the two sets of distinctive policies—the ‘Act East’ and the ‘Act West’—as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy.

GEOSTRATEGIC ISSUES

This section explores the vision behind India’s IPOI initiative, outlines the responses of countries that have expressed interest to work with India under IPOI, and highlights the ways in which these countries are responding to China’s unilateral and belligerent behaviour in the Indo-Pacific. It will underscore the importance of the Quadrilateral initiative^b within the IPOI construct.

India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: The Vision

The IPOI is an open global initiative that draws on existing regional cooperation architecture and mechanisms. India has reached out to

b The Quadrilateral Dialogue comprises the United States, India, Australia, and Japan. Senior foreign ministry officials from the Quad nations have met bimonthly, the grouping has also convened at the ministerial level and formed the basis for a tabletop exercise. (See, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-diamond-past-present-and-future-quadrilateral-security-dialogue>)

several countries to fast-track the IPOI; the MEA has forwarded a comprehensive note to Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam for their comments.¹¹ At the 17th Meeting of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation^c held on August 2020, India and Vietnam agreed to enhance their bilateral cooperation in line with India's IPOI and the ASEAN's Outlook on Indo-Pacific to achieve shared security, prosperity and growth for all in the region. India invited Vietnam to collaborate on one of the seven pillars of the IPOI. This is significant against the backdrop of Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region, in particular in its disputes in the South China Sea.¹² Even in the 15th East Asia Summit conducted in November 2020, EAM Jaishankar referred to the "synergy" between the ASEAN Outlook and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.¹³

The idea is that one or two countries could take the lead for a pillar, and other interested countries could join. This would make it a cooperative venture and accord it transparency and inclusivity. India, for its part, is prepared to take the lead in maritime security and disaster risk management. This was supposed to tie in with the 4th Maritime Security Workshop scheduled for February 2020 under the rubric of the East Asia Summit which India would have co-hosted with Australia and Indonesia.^d PM Modi's initiative also plans to build on the 2017 ASEAN Regional Forum statement against "Illegal, Unreported and Unlicensed

c The Joint Commission is co-chaired by India's Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar and Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Vietnam.

d The initiative is envisioned on the platform of the East Asia Summit, thereby underscoring ASEAN centrality. In India's view, this means upholding ASEAN's territorial integrity and sovereignty and the application of international law (UNCLOS) to the maritime domain. See Surya Gangadharan, "Modi's 'Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative': India Reaches Out to Stakeholders"

Fishing”. India is prepared to host an event on this larger security issue since it concerns livelihood security and food security.¹⁴

Indeed, oceans are shared spaces where international cooperation is a prerequisite for security. For India, building partnerships will be vital to assist governments to ensure aligned and mutually supportive actions across all SDGs and unlock the productive potential of marine assets. A purposive partnership with like-minded countries is at the core of the IPOI.¹⁵

Response of partner countries

Countries like Australia, Vietnam, and the Philippines have expressed their willingness to cooperate with India on the IPOI. In the past, ASEAN countries have entered into cooperative frameworks that they have found to be focusing on specific issues or tasks. To be sure, ASEAN has also been party to such arrangements as the Five Power Defence Arrangement by the founding members of ASEAN—Malaysia and Singapore—with the UK, Australia, and New Zealand in 1971.^e Other joint initiatives are listed in Table 1.

e This was just after the formation of ASEAN in 1967.

Table 1. Key Initiatives by ASEAN Countries

Countries	Joint Initiatives
Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia	MALSINDO - for maritime patrolling of the Strait of Malacca to curb piracy
Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia	Eye in the Sky Initiative
Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines	Trilateral Maritime Patrol (INDOMALPHI)
Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Japan	Timor-Leste-Indonesia-Japan Triangular Cooperation Project
Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines	Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines Trilateral Patrol in the Sulu Sea
ROK, Turkey, Australia	Republic of Korea, Turkey, and Australia (MITKA) ^f
Australia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and Timor Leste	South West Pacific Dialogue

Source: Authors' own, using various sources

India is now looking to engage in “issue-based” alignments.^g With its seven pillars outlined, the IPOI is indeed “task-oriented” as well.

f MIKTA is an informal consultation and coordination platform among Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia. MIKTA was initiated by the Foreign Ministers of the MIKTA member countries on 25 September 2013 on the margins of the 68th UN General Assembly. (See, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/mikta_meksika_endonezya_kore_avustralya_en.mfa#:~:text=MIKTA%20is%20an%20informal%20consultation,the%2068th%20UN%20General%20Assembly.)

g In the 2019 Raisina Dialogue, Former Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said, “The governments in Delhi might have been the last, but they have certainly moved away from the straitjacket of non-alignment—in practice if not in theory. The rhetoric too has changed under the present government. India is now ‘aligned.’ But the alignment is issue-based. It is not ideological. That gives us the capacity to be flexible, gives us the capacity to maintain our decisional autonomy.” (See, C. Raja Mohan, “Raja Mandala: Alliances and strategic autonomy,” *The Indian Express*, 15 January 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/raja-mandala-alliances-and-strategic-autonomy-indian-foreign-policy5538447/>)

Indonesia, particularly, is dissatisfied with the ASEAN way of working and is searching for its role in any alternative regional grouping.^h

Moreover, the ASEAN countries are also recalibrating their policy priorities especially within the Indo-Pacific rubric. The adoption of the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* is an iteration of how a currently divided organisation like the ASEAN also wants to be part of the Indo-Pacific discourse. The *Outlook* lays out the core areas where ASEAN is looking to collaborate with other players of the region, among them: maritime cooperation, connectivity, and UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030.¹⁶ These are in line with the seven pillars of the IPOI.ⁱ

Engagement with African littorals in the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR) will be vital to ensure that the Indo-Pacific region remains open and free for inclusive partnerships, within the parameters of sovereignty, equality, and a rules-based system. African littorals in the region can contribute to the Indo-Pacific discourse by offering a sub-regional view and definition of maritime security challenges, and championing local ownership of pathways towards workable solutions and achieving the SDGs.¹⁷ India and other regional powers can build partnerships with WIOR littorals to build an inclusive maritime security architecture and steer the region into more organised waters.

The China Challenge

At a time when the world is grappling with the manifold impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has been aggressively pursuing its

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- h Indonesia is not alone. Other members of the ASEAN are similarly questioning the efficacy of ASEAN and are not shying away from other partnerships/ constructive engagements. Vietnam has become a close partner of India in many ways.
 - i India has long been a trusted Dialogue partner in the ASEAN and a member of other platforms involving its member countries, such as the East Asia Summit. Many countries like Vietnam and the Philippines have in various statements underlined the need for India to play a more active role in the Indo-Pacific region.

sovereignty claims. It is working to establish itself as a major regional player by employing initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), as well as by adopting assertive security policies towards its neighbours.¹⁸ Since May 2020, Chinese and Indian troops have been involved in a confrontation along the disputed Himalayan border. China's ambitious military plans and its border skirmishes with New Delhi have forced India to recalibrate its China policy and envision a greater role for itself in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁹

Most countries of the Indo-Pacific region have been at the receiving end of China's encroachment and expansionist policies. Australia has accused China "of building an influence in the Pacific by currying favour with the region's smaller nations like Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu and funnelling cash into their infrastructure projects."²⁰ In March 2020, a Chinese fishing boat — possibly belonging to the paramilitary maritime militia — collided with, and damaged, a Japanese destroyer in the East China Sea. In April 2020, Beijing declared new administrative districts in the Paracel and Spratly islands, the latest step in its bid to legitimise effective control over these areas. The same month, a Chinese coast guard ship sank a Vietnamese fishing boat in the South China Sea. In the South China Sea, large-scale land reclamation and militarisation activities have been taking place, which in turn have raised tensions in the region. For several days in August this year, the Pentagon reported that "China has escalated its previously announced exercise activities in the South China Sea by launching four medium-range missiles impacting the stretch between Hainan Island and the Paracel Islands."²¹

India has always emphasised the need to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight in the SCS. It has taken a more vocal stand recently, declaring the SCS as a "global commons"²² wherein all disputes

should be settled in accordance with international law. In the East Asia Summit in November 2020, EAM Dr. Jaishankar stated, “the Code of Conduct negotiations should not be prejudicial to legitimate interests of third parties and should be fully consistent with UNCLOS”.²³ The Indian Navy has reportedly deployed one of its frontline warships in the South China Sea, after the June 15 clash with Chinese PLA troops in the Galwan Valley.²⁴ The Navy also deployed its frontline vessels along the Malacca Straits near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the route from where the Chinese Navy enters the Indian Ocean Region to keep a check on any Chinese naval activity. The Navy also held exercises in the Andamans and has deployed MiG-29K fighters in the islands.²⁵ Of late, India has viewed the Western Pacific as falling within the ambit of its maritime security interests. The focus on maritime issues is evident from the increase in maritime exchanges led by the Indian Navy, with countries such as Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Japan.

There has also been a steady increase of Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, raising security concerns for India. According to Indian Naval Chief Admiral Karambir Singh, “There are four to six Chinese research vessels operating in the IOR beyond India’s EEZ in addition to over 600 Chinese fishing vessels that are in the IOR beyond India’s EEZ for every year since 2015-2019.”²⁶

Countries like India—historically non-aligned—are now shifting their policy stance, shedding their wariness of irking Chinese sentiments, and entering into “issue-based alignments” with other players of the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, like-minded countries of the Indo-Pacific region are working together in various minilateral and plurilateral platforms to maintain a peaceful global order. The world is also seeing a rise in middle-power coalitions, such as those of India, Australia, and Indonesia, as well as India, Australia, and France.

Locating the Quad

India has been engaging in various 2+2 dialogues.^j Indeed, as the ongoing pandemic exposed the faultlines in multilateralism, there has been a proliferation of minilateral and plurilateral initiatives. The Quad, for example, is stepping up with the September 2019 Foreign Ministers Meeting, as well as the second Quad ministerial meeting in October 2020.^k The Quad appears to be sending a signal to Beijing that they are solidifying around common security concerns, and extending to other issues including secure supply chains and a free and open Indo-Pacific.²⁷ Given Chinese aggressive expansionist policies, these forums have found it necessary to discuss security issues like the Chinese actions in the SCS and the East China Sea. Some ASEAN countries have also expressed that India needs to take a proper stand on the SCS dispute and not stick to the traditional position that “freedom of navigation should be maintained in the SCS”.²⁸

However, the Quad countries should look to rally global support for countries like Vietnam and Malaysia who have recently lodged challenges²⁹ at the UN against China’s nine-dash line claims. There are reports that Vietnam, like the Philippines, is planning to take China to

j These forums include those with the US and Australia, trilateral dialogues between India-Japan and the US, India-Japan-Australia (JAI), Russia-India-China, India-Australia-Indonesia, and the Quadrilateral meetings between India, Japan, Australia, and the US. Other possible new minilateral platforms are the India-Japan-Indonesia, and India-Australia-Vietnam.

k In the meeting, EAM S Jaishankar stressed the need for “upholding the rules-based international order, underpinned by the rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes.” See: “Opening remarks by EAM at 2nd Quad Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo, Japan”, Ministry of External Affairs Media Center, October 6, 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33097/Opening+remarks+by+EAM+at+2nd+Quad+Ministerial+Meeting+in+Tokyo+Japan>

the International Arbitration Tribunal to hold it accountable for its vast claims. China has been trying to negotiate with the Philippines on their territorial dispute and has also been pushing Malaysia to agree to enter into bilateral consultations.³⁰ The Quad members should ensure that any discussion on the SCS takes place in multilateral platforms like the ASEAN or the EAS.

The Quad also needs to look at issues beyond the hard security realm: connectivity, blue economy, and capacity building, among others. They can work with India and organise maritime security workshops, maritime law workshops, and academic exchanges. They can collaborate on developing port infrastructure for greater connectivity with the Indian Ocean littorals through infrastructure development initiatives like Sagarmala, Blue Dot, the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure, Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. Helping Southeast Asian and South Pacific countries in building disaster-resilient infrastructure is another area where the Quad countries can collaborate on under PM Modi's CDRI. The more advanced Navies of the four Quad countries can conduct workshops to provide training to the navies of the Southeast Asian countries, and workshops with the coast guards can also be organised. All four countries of the Quad need to work together to strengthen their influence in Southeast Asia.¹

Meanwhile, in the West, the European Union, mainly led by France has been heavily invested in the maritime security aspects of the Western Indian Ocean. It has provided capacity building and training

1 The US Naval War College, the Naval War Colleges in India, the Royal Australian Naval War College, the Naval War College of Japan can do courses, training programs, exchange programs with the Defence University in Indonesia, SESKOAL (Staff College in Indonesia), National Defence Academy of Vietnam, Vietnam Maritime University, National Defence University of Malaysia.

assistance to all the littorals in the region. France and UK have welcomed greater Indian participation in this region, mainly because of India's sheer workforce and expertise in providing training to coast guards and maintenance and operation of ships. Given the Australia-India-France Trilateral held in September 2020, there are opportunities for more minilaterals like India-France-Australia, India-Japan-France, India-France-Kenya, and India-France-South Africa.

THE PILLARS OF INDIA'S IPOI

1. Maritime Security

Over 90 percent of global trade is conducted through the maritime route, with a value that has grown from US\$6 trillion to about US\$20 trillion in 15 years.³¹ Strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific thus depends on the ability to reap economic benefits from the oceans and to respond to the challenges therein. These challenges are multi-faceted: sea-borne terrorism; piracy in the waters of the Indian Ocean, Sulu Sea, and SCS; climate change; natural and man-made disasters; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and maritime disputes and flashpoints like the SCS. These disputes hamper progress toward inclusive regional maritime security cooperation.³² Despite problems posed by complex geography, varying levels of resources for maritime enforcement in littoral countries exacerbating the difficulties faced by law enforcement agencies, Southeast Asian and African governments have launched unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral initiatives to improve regional maritime security. (See Table 2.)

Table 2: Maritime Security

Initiatives undertaken by India and potential partner countries

EASTERN INDIAN OCEAN	WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Information Sharing Centre (IFC) in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combatting Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships are designed to enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) • Establishment of an ASEAN Coast Guard Forum helps regulate shipping by creating a systematic way to implement shipping protocols • In 2017, ASEAN held its first multilateral naval exercise to improve operational capacity and interoperability among member-states • Indian Navy in January 2019 commissioned a new air base – INS Kohassa in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands • India signed a shared vision statement with Indonesia in May 2018 to enhance cooperation in Indo-Pacific, and a similar agreement with Australia in June 2020 • India and Myanmar conducted first-ever bilateral joint military and maritime exercise in November 2017 and 2018 respectively • India and Indonesia also conduct ‘Samudra Shakti’ exercise in 2018. • India conducted a joint sail in the South China Sea with navies of USA, Philippines, Japan in May 2019. India, Singapore, and Thailand naval exercise took place in September 2019. • India also conducted ‘Tiger Triumph’ (tri-service exercise) with USA in November 2019 off the Visakhapatnam and Kakinada coasts • India has inked agreements on mutual logistical support with Singapore in 2018, and with Australia and Japan more recently in 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships off the coast of Somalia and Gulf of Aden, primarily from 2008-2013, has produced unprecedented levels of regional and international cooperation • Successful multinational efforts to tackle piracy in East African waters have reduced the problem in Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR) to a large extent. However, piracy in the region is suppressed, it is still not eradicated due to the presence of Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs) • Currently, there are total 19 active VNSAs operating in WIOR like Al-Shabaab, Al Qaeda, Lord’s Resistance Army, Haqqani Network, among others • Since 2008, India has deployed over 75 naval ships in WIOR which has safely escorted over 3440 people, including 413 Indian-flagged ships with over 25,062 mariners involved • India has thwarted over 44 piracy attempts and has apprehended 120 pirates • Indian Navy was one of the first to respond to the deteriorating situation in Strait of Hormuz and has escorted 82 lakh tons of cargo onboard 74 flagged Indian merchant vessels • Indian Navy undertook Operation Sankalp in January 2020 to monitor ships that pass the Persian Gulf and escort Indian-flagged merchant vessels • These anti-piracy operations have led to greater bilateral interaction with other navies in the region and have improved interoperability • India has also conducted Hydrographic Surveys for African countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Mauritius, Seychelles and has MoU on hydrographic cooperation with 3 countries: Mauritius, Tanzania, and Seychelles • India and France have also conducted joint patrols from Reunion Island with P-81 maritime reconnaissance aircraft • Recently, INS Sunayna also sustained a deployment in Gulf of Aden for 80 days without entering any ports. The ship was replenished at sea by Indian Navy and United States Navy tankers

Source: Authors’ own, from various sources

2. Maritime Ecology and Maritime Resources

Blue Economy is increasingly being recognised as an important dimension to future sustainable development of oceans and their resources. However, resource exploitation, human-induced habitat degradation, and other form of anthropogenic activities and the effects of climate change have contributed to the drastic plunge in ocean health

and ecosystem. In fisheries, for example, many countries across the Indo-Pacific have productive fisheries and strong laws governing them, yet these resources continue to remain vulnerable to destructive fishing practices and overfishing. In WIOR, 35 percent of the fish stocks are fully exploited in the region, whereas over 28 percent are overexploited.³³ Overfishing, foreign fishing, and IUU practices are also depleting fish stocks in the South China Sea and destroying habitat in the Coral Triangle that spans much of the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei.³⁴ To be sure, India and other countries have initiated programmes to arrest these issues. (See Table 3.)

Table 3: Maritime Ecology and Maritime Resources

Initiatives undertaken by India and potential partner countries

COUNTRY/COUNTRIES	EASTERN INDIAN OCEAN	WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN
Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investing heavily in sustainable industries such as coastal tourism, well-run fisheries, global shipping, and port infrastructure Philippines is conserving its fragile marine ecosystem by creating Marine Protected Areas 	
Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hosted 2018 Our Oceans Conference Has committed to protect almost 80,000 square miles from marine plastic debris Spearheading the Jakarta Declaration on Blue Economy under rubric of IORA 	
Seychelles, Mauritius, South Africa		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted Blue Economy policies like Debt for Adaptation Swap, 2013 National Ocean Economic Strategy and Operation Phakisa, respectively
Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar, Kenya		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted Green economic principles as national priorities Developed legislations that strengthens community participation and empowerment in natural resource governance Developing and expanding many Marine Protected Areas and Locally Managed Marine Areas
Kenya		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First ever sustainable Blue Economy conference took place in Nairobi, 2018 In June 2020, Kenya and Portugal co-hosted the UN Oceans Conference

<p>India</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively involved in sub-regional groupings like Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle, Ayeyawady Chao Phraya Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MEA and FICCI conducts workshops for IORA member-states, especially Somalia and Yemen on improving quality and value of fisheries products, microfinancing, and banking for artisanal fisheries development Impart important lessons for foreign fishing communities on marketing strategies, and removal of middlemen as implemented by Kerala government Indian Institute of Technology, Madras has collaborated with University of Mauritius to provide short-term courses on coastal engineering
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Source: Authors' own, from various sources

3. Capacity Building and Information Sharing

Effective maritime enforcement capacity begins with strong maritime domain awareness (MDA).^m This capacity is vital for promoting marine safety, responding to vessels in distress, stopping illegal activity, tracking at-sea transshipments, and protecting waters from illegal incursions by foreign vessels. Most countries must rely on multilateral information-sharing.

The idea envisioned by India under its IPOI and SAGAR doctrine is to generate seamless, real-time, holistic picture of the wider Indo-Pacific region. This provides an opportunity for countries to work towards strengthening links between the Western and Eastern Indian Ocean through collective exercises.

India has launched its own Indian Ocean Region-Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR), which has established linkages with over 18 countries and 15 maritime security agencies.³⁵ Information sharing can be done

m MDA is defined as the ability to gather, process, analyse, and share real-time information about what is occurring at sea.

through direct communication and by sharing agreements between the respective maritime agencies or could find new mechanisms to work with regional information fusion centers. There are a host of regional centers dedicated to the surveillance of maritime spaces and sea lanes of communication across the Indo-Pacific.

Table 4: Capacity Building and Information Sharing

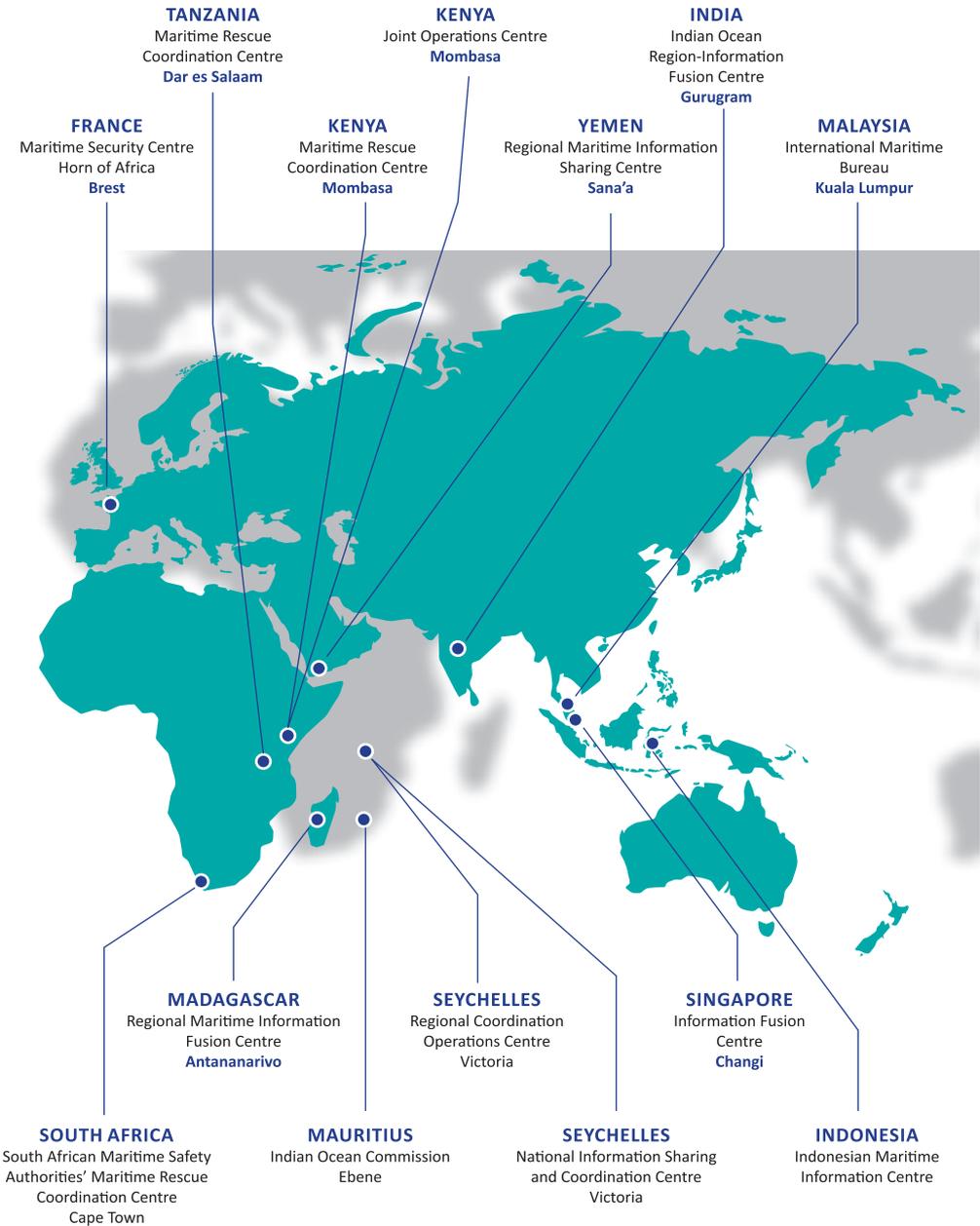
India’s maritime assistance to select countries in the Indo Pacific

COUNTRY	ASSISTANCE / EXPORT
Mauritius	<p>Regularly patrolled Mauritius EEZ since 2003</p> <p>Deputes naval officer to manage the National Coast Guard of Mauritius</p> <p>Gifted Indian Naval Ship (INS) Amar in 1971</p> <p>Periodic provider of maritime reconnaissance assets – Interceptor patrol boat (2001), 3 Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft (2004 and 2010), 3 Island aircraft engines (2013), an inshore survey vessel (2013), chain of coastal surveillance radar (2017)</p> <p>Conducts hydrographic surveys and assist Mauritian Coast Guard ships in EEZ surveillance and joint patrols</p> <p>Announced a US\$500mn line of credit in 2017</p> <p>In 2018, both countries signed a pact to enhance maritime security cooperation in anti-piracy operations, and in countering illegal fishing and drug trafficking in IOR</p>
Seychelles	<p>Indian Navy and Coast Guard regularly assists Seychelles in maintaining security by providing maritime surveillance, ocean surveys, training, and maritime equipment and repair</p> <p>Since 2005, India has gifted the Seychelles Coast Guard a fast-attack vessel INS Tarmugli, 3 Dornier Do-228 aircrafts, 3 Chetak helicopters and interceptor boats, the latest in 2019</p> <p>India also installed 6 coastal surveillance radar systems in 2015 and assisted in ariel and sea patrols in Seychelles’ EEZ</p> <p>Conducts regular army-army exercise (LAMITYE) every biennially, the 8th edition took place in 2018</p>
Madagascar	<p>During President Ram Nath Kovind’s visit in 2018, both countries emphasized on cooperation on maritime security and signed an MoU on defense cooperation with a focus on capacity building and training of Madagascar’s personnel</p> <p>India activated a listening post in Northern Madagascar in 2007</p> <p>Regular goodwill port visits to Antsiranana</p> <p>Ministry of Shipping, Government of India hosted the first ever Maritime India Summit in April 2016</p> <p>Indian Navy provides regular humanitarian assistance (2016), Operation Vanilla in aftermath of Cyclone Diane in March 2020</p>
Comoros	<p>During Vice President Venkaiah Naidu’s visit in 2019, India extended a US\$20mn LOC to Comoros for strengthening bilateral defence and maritime cooperation</p> <p>Regular goodwill port visits to Moroni (2018)</p> <p>India sent a 14-member medical assistance team in May 2020</p>
Mozambique	<p>Indian Navy regularly patrols Mozambique Channel and provided security during AU Summit in 2003 in Maputo and World Economic Forum Summit in 2004</p> <p>Regular goodwill ship visits (2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016)</p> <p>2006 signed MoU on Defence cooperation under which a Joint Defence Working Group was set up</p> <p>During defence minister Rajnath Singh’s visit in July 2019, India gifted 44 SUVs, signed MoU’s on hydrography and sharing of white shipping information, and gifted 2 Indian-made Fast Interceptor Boats</p> <p>A four-member team of Indian Coast Guard is assisting with training and support for maintenance and operation of the two boats</p>

Vietnam	<p>India and Vietnam pursue naval cooperation which includes composite training programmes in the field of submarines, aviation, and dockyard training</p> <p>In 2015, both countries' coast guard signed an MOU for establishment of collaborative relationship to combat transnational crime and develop cooperation</p> <p>In 2016, India and Vietnam upgraded their ties to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership</p> <p>Both have signed an agreement to exchange white shipping information</p> <p>India is also exploring the possibility of selling warships to the Vietnamese Coast Guard</p>
Philippines	<p>In 2017, India and Philippines signed an MOU on defence cooperation and logistics</p> <p>In 2019, India and Philippines signed an MOU on the sharing of white shipping information</p> <p>India and Philippines coast guard regularly conducts bilateral maritime exercises</p>

Source: Authors' own, from various sources

Figure 1. Information-Sharing and Fusion Centres in the Indo-Pacific



Source: Authors' own, from various sources

4. Maritime Connectivity

Connectivity and proper port infrastructure is the bedrock of maritime trade, shipping, and maritime transport. India’s east and west coast comprise 12 major ports along with several minor ones. Through its Sagarmala project, India is upgrading its physical infrastructure, digitisation process, adjusting its regulatory measures to overhaul the port infrastructure and operations in the country.³⁶

Some of the maritime connectivity initiatives undertaken by India are listed in Table 5, followed by three figures that detail the proposed ports and coastal EEZs under India’s Sagarmala project, the location of Sittwe port, and the location of Aceh and Sabang port.

Table 5: Maritime Connectivity

Initiatives undertaken by India

EASTERN INDIAN OCEAN	WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India is developing Sittwe port in Myanmar’s Rakhine State and is also implementing US\$484 million Kaladan transport project to connect Rakhine state with India’s North-eastern state of Mizoram A Joint Task Force has been set up for strengthening physical, economic, and people-to-people connectivity between Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Aceh province, and to develop port infrastructure in Sabang. The task force held its first meeting in December 2019 in Aceh India and Indonesia have also been organising an infrastructure summit from 2017 onwards which is attended by both government and private officials There are already plans for port-to-port cooperation between India and Thailand, and India and Indonesia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India plans to develop infrastructure in Agalega island in Mauritius. The agreement was signed back in 2015 India is also developing a joint logistics facility in Assumption Island in Seychelles. The agreement was signed back in 2015 However, both these deals with Mauritius and Seychelles have faced opposition from locals India and Japan are collaborating under the Asia Africa Growth Corridor, conceptualised back in 2016. The AAGC focuses on four priority areas: development and cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, enhancing capacities and skills, and people-to-people partnership

Source: Authors’ own, from various sources

Figure 2: Proposed ports and coastal economic zones under the Sagarmala project



Source: <http://sagarmala.gov.in/>

Figure 3: Location of Sittwe port



Source: <https://whereismap.net/>

Figure 4: Location of Aceh and Sabang



Source: Authors own, created on Google maps

5. Disaster Management

Natural disasters like cyclones and tsunamis not only wreak havoc on the shores of the littorals but also have a detrimental impact on maritime trade and connectivity. This collective concern has emerged as a prospective arena for countries to collaborate on initiatives in disaster management. The ANI—which are in the Andaman Sea and close to these Southeast Asian littorals—are more vulnerable and thus classified under ‘Very High Damage Risk Zone,’ often experiencing intense seismicity.³⁷

Table 6: Disaster Management

Initiatives undertaken by India

- India’s first National Disaster Management Plan was released in 2016 which articulates India’s enthusiasm to build disaster resilience in Indo Pacific through sustained regional partnerships
- Under IORA Action Plan 2017-2021, the development of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) has been given focused direction by India. India chaired the core group on DRM for a period of two years
- The core group, consisting of Indonesia, Mauritius, Mozambique, and Sri Lanka, along with member-states are currently working to finalise the regional Work Plan and IORA Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)
- At the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit in New York, PM Narendra Modi launched the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) which currently has 18 members like USA, UK, Australia, France, Japan, Germany, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, among others.
- India has invited African countries, that are prone to cyclones, tsunamis, and other natural disasters to join this coalition
- Since 2016, India and Thailand have been conducting HADR Table-top exercises. Its most recent edition ‘Ex Siam-Bharat:17’ was held in 2017
- India is also actively involved in the ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise
- India is also working closely with Indonesia on disaster risk management
- DRM and resilience, including early warning of natural disasters through modern early warning tools has been an important component of India’s capacity building and technical assistance programmes for African countries
- India’s Institute of Disaster Management regularly conducts training programmes for countries like Ghana, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Malawi, among others
- African countries have been significant beneficiaries of India’s HADR missions: Operation Blossom (Libya 2011), Operation Raahat (Yemen 2015), Cyclone Idai and Diane (Mozambique and Madagascar 2019), Operation Vanilla (Madagascar 2020)

Source: Authors’ own, from various sources

KEY CHALLENGES

The Indo-Pacific is replete with maritime territorial disputes, from the Persian Gulf to the mid-Indian Ocean Chagos archipelago, to the Southwest Pacific. The most noteworthy of these disputes include the Senkakus/Diaoyutai (Japan- China); the Pratas Islands (Taiwan-China); the Paracels (China-Vietnam); Scarborough Shoal (China-Philippines); and the Spratly archipelago (China-Vietnam-Philippines-Malaysia-Brunei) and Kenya-Somalia territorial dispute.³⁸ These disputes make international collaboration difficult to consider; even agreements on sustainable fisheries management are elusive.

Another concern for the littorals of the eastern side will be the fear of irking Chinese sentiments, given their economic dependencies on China, and in the context of worsening SCS disputes. Further, they have a sensitivity to working with a third country which can compromise their own sovereign stand and the principle of ASEAN centrality.ⁿ

Moreover, there are various limitations that are confronting the Indian Navy. Although it is now more networked and technologically enabled, the Navy continues to face budgetary constraints: its budgetary allocation has reduced from 18 percent of the defence budget in 2012-2013, to 13 percent in 2018.³⁹ This negatively impacts India's future force planning and capability development. Coordination and building synergies between various stakeholders are a formidable task facing the Indian Navy.

It has not helped that India has a poor track record of converting capitals into deliverables or influence and needs to work towards

n India would also need to consider how advantageous the principle of 'ASEAN centrality' is, or if it more in the realm of rhetoric.

bridging the gap between its commitment and implementation. Most of the IOR littorals lack the capacity to ensure the security of their declared maritime zones and look towards India to ensure its security and patrol the seas. However, such assistance would require sustained maritime deployments that would need assured budgetary support. Additionally, when it comes to allocation of resources, there is hardly any concept of prioritisation in the Ministry of Defence. There is also little dialogue between the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of External Affairs.⁴⁰

POLICY PROPOSALS

India has stayed away from taking a definitive position on the contested power politics in the Indo-Pacific and has largely maintained cordial relations with most countries and stakeholders in the region. The IPOI seeks to promote a forum under which countries deliberate cooperative ways to secure maritime boundaries, promote free trade and sustainable use of marine resources. The IPOI echoes India's plurilateral approach of engagement and focuses not only on ASEAN centrality, but also on Indo-Pacific connectivity, sustainable infrastructure and economic cooperation leading to regional integration.⁴¹

This section outlines specific proposals on how the IPOI's pillars could work around such "cooperative, consultative, inclusive" framework. The aim is to offer a broad spectrum of policy areas and initiatives, from government-to-government to people-to-people. These policies are sufficiently broad to accommodate a wide range of activities and engagements, from highly informal conversations to institutionalised cooperation—both bottom-up and top-down initiatives. The core of these proposals are in the maritime domain, as it is expected to be the most obvious point of strategic convergence.

Government-to-Government

- Track-1 maritime security dialogues and workshops over regional issues such as peacekeeping, counterterrorism, piracy, IUU fishing, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief. The naval heads of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines, Australia, Japan France, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, Sri Lanka can participate in these events.
 - Meetings of Indian and ASEAN naval heads, initially on the sidelines of the ADMM Plus meetings, which can then be elevated to yearly formal meetings.
 - Coordinated patrols^o conducted with the Indonesian Navy in the Sunda and Lombok straits, since these straits are strategically important for all three countries, for their interests in the Indian Ocean. These straits are being increasingly used for human trafficking. Additionally, there is a growing presence of Chinese vessels and submarines in these straits.⁴²
 - An exercise involving the coast guards of the ASEAN countries. Considering that BAKAMLA (the Indonesian Coast Guard) is a new establishment, it is possible to provide training at the Indian naval war colleges.
 - The ASEAN countries could invite India to the ASEAN Coast Guard and Law Enforcement Forum, or India can initiate an India-ASEAN
-
- o India has been conducting coordinated patrol with the TNI-AL (Indonesian Navy) from 2002 onwards, but these patrols take place at Port Blair under the aegis of Andaman and Nicobar Command. The closing ceremony of this patrol is usually hosted at Belawan, Indonesia. (See, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/27th-india-indonesia-coordinated-patrol-corpat>)

Coast Guard Forum where regular exercises and interactions between the Indian and the coast guards of the ASEAN countries can take place. Capacity building and training, exchange visits of delegations under this forum can be organised. Such exercises can also be conducted with the National Coast Guard of Mauritius, Seychelle's Coast Guard, and Kenya's Coast Guard. Just like India does with Mozambique, a team from Indian Coast Guard could be stationed in these other African countries to train their crews and provide support for the maintenance and operation of their naval ships.

- In 2020, the EU Critical Maritime Route Wider Indian Ocean II (EU CRIMARIO-II) project was launched which supports regional countries' endeavours to enhance maritime situational awareness in WIOR. The project is looking to expand its geographical scope towards South Asia and Southeast Asia. India is situated right in between the two key MDA stakeholders in the wider Indo Pacific i.e., IFC based in Changi, Singapore, and the EU CRIMARIO II. Both these organisations have launched their own information-sharing tools: IFC Singapore's Information-Sharing System (IRIS) and EU CRIMARIO II's Indian Ocean Regional Information Sharing (IORIS) platform. Since India has also launched its own Indian Ocean Region-Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR), there are ample opportunities for India to collaborate with these organisations.
- Not only has India already become an observer to the Indian Ocean Commission (COI) in March 2020, and to the Djibouti Code of Conduct and its 2017 Jeddah Amendment, India is also posting naval liaison officers at the RMIFC in Madagascar and European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi.⁴³ This will help deepen MDA in WIOR by monitoring maritime activities and promoting information-sharing and exchange.

- India must invite naval liaison officers from African countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, South Africa to be posted at IFC-IOR. France has already deployed a liaison officer in December 2019, and Mauritius and Seychelles have expressed interest to deputise their liaison officers. In 2019, under the aegis of IFC-IOR, the Indian Navy hosted a maritime information-sharing workshop that was attended by delegates from around 29 countries across the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁴ This workshop led to a BIMSTEC Coastal Security Workshop in November 2019 that was attended by many countries. Because East African countries also depend on maritime trade for their economic development, such workshops could be hosted by Indian Navy for the Western Indian Ocean countries.
- Deals can be entered into with the Indian shipyards like Mazagon Dock Limited in Mumbai, Cochin Shipyard Limited in Chennai, or Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers in Kolkata to supply patrol vessels and coast guard ships to the Indonesian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Kenyan coast guards. Countries can negotiate about implementing mandated fitting of Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) class-based transponders in all small boats that are used for illegal activities.
- The naval exercises between countries with India and/or ASEAN Multilateral Naval exercise can introduce disaster preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery.

People-to-people, civil society, and institutional/organisational linkages

- Education exchanges and training exercises must be expanded to include all levels—from the academy to the senior staff colleges. Broader joint research on maritime studies involving think tanks and universities from India, Australia, Japan, and the ASEAN

countries could strengthen bottom-up approaches to maritime security architecture-building.

- Track-II workshops centered on capacity-building, maritime safety, and security for Indo-Pacific coast guards, to be led by India.
- Workshops on both maritime domain awareness and UNCLOS familiarity amongst the maritime security practitioners of India, ASEAN, Australia, France, Japan, South Africa.⁴⁵ Given the ongoing SCS dispute, the importance of understanding and interpreting different regional views on how “freedom of navigation” applies to foreign military activity in exclusive economic zones cannot be ignored.
- Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand can be potential partners for India to work along with on many aspects of Blue Economy, primarily on sustainable use of ocean resources: reducing marine plastic debris, and curbing illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Given that the dumping of marine plastic debris is one of the focus areas in India’s IPOI, India and Indonesia can form a Working Group along with other littorals like Malaysia and Thailand to deal with issues in the eastern Indian Ocean.
- Apart from collaborations between the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM) and University of Mauritius, coastal engineering courses could be undertaken by other IITs and other universities in African countries such as University of Seychelles. India and other countries could explore not only short-term courses, but also developing Master of Science (MSC) and long-term higher-education courses on coastal management and coastal engineering techniques.
- Future collaborations can happen between IITM and the Department of Aquatic Resources Management of Institut Pertanian Bogor, Indonesia for short-term courses on Aquatic

resource management. There can be joint research conducted between these universities and institutes, to help small island nations in addressing their climate change challenges.

- India can conduct theme-based seminars on topics such as “strengthening legal provisions for marine habitat conservation”, or “preservation of marine protected areas and locally managed marine areas”, “legal provisions of IUU fishing”, and exploring cooperation among marine law enforcement agencies of different countries across the Indo-Pacific.
- Plastic waste leakage from municipal waste collection in cities across the Indo-Pacific countries is a vital challenge. The Alliance to End Plastic Waste and United Nations Habitat’s joint project to reduce plastic waste leakage currently targets six cities in Eastern Africa and Southern Asia: Nairobi and Mombasa in Kenya, Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar in Ethiopia, Thiruvananthapuram, and Mangalore in India. This project can be extended to include other cities in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, South Africa, and the Philippines.
- Fisheries management workshops, one that is done for Somalia and Yemen (Somali-Yemen Sustainable Programme - SYDP), should be extended to other countries that have interest such as Seychelles, Kenya, and Tanzania.
- India’s National Fisheries Development Board must look to expand linkages with the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute, and Seychelles Fishing Authority.
- The ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment works as a forum for coordinating ASEAN initiatives on sustainable marine resource management. By consistently bringing together

member states for project collaboration, ASEAN creates an environment of mutual understanding and solidarity in Southeast Asia. India's National Fisheries Development Board can partner with this Working Group and host conferences on sustainable use of marine resources in the Eastern Indian Ocean. Further work can happen between India's National Fisheries Development Board and the ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment on synchronising mandates that govern best practices in the blue economy and fisheries sectors.

- There is tremendous potential in advancing maritime research in the Pacific for issues like sustainable energy and climate change. India's contribution to knowledge and adaptation on resilience, adaptation and mitigation can lead to friendlier relations.
- The IPOI could be used to establish greater structural linkages between IORA and other multilateral groupings or initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, and Southwest Indian Ocean Fisheries.⁴⁶
- The MEA along with the IORA Secretariat could also launch a Blue Economy Task Force that would comprise representatives from governments, private, and business sector, for sustained dialogue and follow up.
- India should look to develop and popularise the concept of Green or Blue Bonds^p as has been done successfully by Seychelles.

p A bond is a fixed income instrument that represents a loan made by an investor to a borrower (typically corporate or governmental). A green bond is a fixed income instrument designed specifically to support and fund climate-related or environmental projects, whereas a blue bond is a relatively new type of sustainability bond which finance projects related to ocean conservation.

- In areas of transportation of minerals that are recovered from deep seabed, storage and port facilities, India could look to develop and explore business opportunities with countries like South Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius, Malaysia, Singapore in infrastructure and logistics that may be required.
- India's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) can organise workshops and joint research programmes on awareness and best practices among countries.
- The Naval War Colleges of the US, India, Australia, Japan, and Indonesia can collaborate and conduct structured programmes for the training of in-service military officers.
- India can explore deputing retired naval and coast guard officers who have operational expertise for providing training on the ground and building stronger links with IPOI partner countries. This will bring the much-needed domain expertise and overcome capacity constraints within India's own developmental programmes and initiatives.

Infrastructure development and connectivity

- Indonesia is planning to host the Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Summit in 2021,⁴⁷ and this will be a great platform for India, Australia, Japan, and the US to attract partners for infrastructure development programmes. In recent years, all these countries have started or announced plans to deepen their economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific. The US has initiated the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistant Network and Blue Dot Network; Japan is working on its Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure; Australia plans to build new regional economic connectivity in South Asia and has earmarked \$25 million for the venture;⁴⁸ and

India and Japan announced the Asia Africa Growth Corridor in 2017.

- The ports of Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia are more advanced than those on the eastern coast of India. Therefore, India-ASEAN Connectivity Summits can be organised by India where the port authorities of these countries can be invited.^q India can also draw lessons from their experience.
- A Chamber for Shipping to promote shipping cooperation between India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. As a business-to-business entity, the chamber could be a sub-unit of the existing trade and industry chambers of the two countries, or else a separate one.⁴⁹
- Conferences around the theme of promoting shipping cooperation between the countries of the Indo-Pacific.
- India's Sagarmala project should aim at collaborating with other regional connectivity initiatives like the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) of Thailand, the Sea Toll Highway of Indonesia, the 'Build Build Build' of the Philippines; and the ASEAN Masterplan on Connectivity 2025.
- Prospects for greater connectivity with other ports in Western Sumatra besides Aceh and Sabang should be explored.^r The development of India's eastern ports and the creation of new ones

q Including, for example, the Port Authority of Thailand, PELINDO of Indonesia along with the private players like Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), Evergreen, and DP (Dubai Port) World, Chambers of Commerce.

r These can include connectivity between Sibolga, Teluk Bayar, Bengkulu, Bandar Lampung, Cilacap, Belawan, Kota Cina in west Sumatra and Malahayati, Kuala Tanjung, Belawan in Northern Sumatra with the ports in eastern India like Kolkata-Haldia, Paradip, Visakhapatnam, Kattupalli, Chennai and Port Blair, along with the Krishnapatnam, Kamarajar and Tuticorin ports.

multimodal links with Myanmar and the Kolkata Port in India and India's northeast.⁵¹

Figure 6: Location of Ranong port



Source: <https://oilpintu.wixsite.com/sbta/thai-ports-map>

- India can initiate talks on coastal shipping, cruise tourism with Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia under the ASEAN Maritime Forum, as well as with Mauritius and Seychelles under the Indian Ocean Commission.

- India has adequate expertise and capacity for shipbuilding. India can strengthen inter-island water transport in the WIOR by developing the region's inter-island ship services and foreshore ferry services just like it does in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. There is enormous possibility of reciprocating this same technique in East African waters. India can explore the possibility of gifting small passenger ships to enhance inter-island connectivity between the Vanilla islands i.e., Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros who can run it on their own. Indian entrepreneurs might be willing to run such ferry services if they are provided with some concessional financing.
- Countries like Indonesia, Australia, Japan, Rwanda, United Kingdom, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Italy, Mexico, Fiji, and Mongolia are members of PM Modi's recently launched Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). Other countries should also be encouraged to become members of this initiative, as they face challenges in building and/or retrofitting infrastructure to withstand disasters.^s Alongside IORA, the CDRI could be another initiative where the countries can cooperate on medium-term economic outcomes.

Strengthening inter-ministerial coordination

- India needs to look at Blue Economy with a holistic perspective by institutionalising the Ministry of External Affairs as the nodal point for dialogue, coordination, and research.
- India ought to develop a Defence Diplomacy Fund that will require collaborative effort from the ministries of Defence, External

^s Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore; and African countries including South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, Comoros, Kenya, and Tanzania.

Affairs, Commerce and Industry, and Shipping. The financial resources for such a Fund must be shared and allocated in a prudent manner.

- Although the entire resource pool is going to be limited, the allocation which the Indian Navy will receive for foreign assistance has to be prioritised and shared with the relevant executing agencies.
- If India wants to play a leading role in ensuring the safety, security, and stability of the maritime domain and convert its financial clout to strategic influence, it must push for a coalition of all the agencies concerned. Perhaps the National Security Council Secretariat or a proposed National Maritime Commission will be the most appropriate organisation to carry out such a role.⁵²
- The ministries of External Affairs and Defence should work with the academia as well as think tanks to work towards a broader perspective.
- The engagement could be expanded to include defence educational and research institutions. Meetings should involve the broader civilian defence communities.

CONCLUSION

India's vision for the Indo-Pacific is one in which freedom of navigation, overflight, sustainable development, protection of the maritime environment, and an open, free, fair, and mutually beneficial trade and investment system are guaranteed for all. The IPOI was launched by India in 2019 with the aim to manage, conserve, sustain, and secure the maritime domain. Since then, India has been working to strengthen practical cooperation with its like-minded partner countries to provide

solutions to global challenges. It can hardly be overemphasised that the security, stability, peace, and prosperity of the vast Indo-Pacific region—accounting for 64 percent of the world’s population and 62 percent of global GDP—is vital for the world. Although every nation and region have their own imperatives and priorities, India, being one of the earliest proponents of the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ concept, has continued to urge partners to undertake cooperative endeavours to create a safe and secure maritime domain in the region.

Some challenges are likely to remain. For one, the smaller littorals, the ASEAN and African countries would be unwilling to get caught between great-power rivalries and also hesitant to be part of initiatives that would purposefully exclude any particular country. In this regard, the bottom-up approaches suggested under the various pillars can be a good starting point for the short term. In the medium and long term, other more formal measures can be embarked upon.

Given India’s sheer size, its capacities and widening interests, it will play a significant role in the post-COVID-19 global revival. Towards this end, building purposive partnerships with like-minded countries of the Indo-Pacific will continue to inform India’s plurilateral approach of engagement under the IPOI. 

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